



# PSC NEWS

## Missouri Public Service Commission

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### **PSC TO HOLD HEARING ON EMERGENCY RULEMAKING ON COLD WEATHER RULE**

Jefferson City (October 25, 2001)---The Missouri Public Service Commission will hold a hearing on **Wednesday, October 31, 2001**, to receive comments from interested parties on whether an emergency rule to the PSC's current Cold Weather Rule is necessary, and what an emergency rule (if one is found to be necessary) should accomplish and what it should say. The Commission will hold the hearing beginning at **1:30 pm in Room 310** of the Governor Office Building in Jefferson City.

In a continued effort to help Missouri customers with high natural gas bills from last winter, the Missouri Public Service Commission will evaluate the current Cold Weather Rule procedures through an emergency rulemaking proceeding.

"We are carefully evaluating the current Cold Weather Rule given the extraordinary circumstances caused by last winter's high natural gas prices," stated Commission Chairman Kelvin Simmons. "As we have stated several times in the past, there are approximately 29,000 households in Missouri currently without natural gas service and another 50,000 plus households facing disconnection of natural gas for non-payment."

The Cold Weather Rule, designed to help customers with heat-related utility bills, is in effect from November 1st through March 31st and has been a part of the Commission's rules and regulations since 1977. Since its inception, the rule has helped nearly two million needy customers maintain heat-related service during the winter. Since 1977, the rule has undergone several revisions. In 1993, the Commission added a temperature provision to the rule. Now, the Cold Weather Rule prohibits the disconnection of heat-related service when temperatures are predicted to fall below 30 degrees. A utility company cannot shut off service on a day when the National Weather Service has issued a local forecast between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., for the following 24 hours, predicting the temperature will drop below 30 degrees.

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The Cold Weather Rule allows customers to maintain service under certain payment terms, restricts deposits, ensures customers are given adequate notification of a proposed discontinuance, encourages customers who can't pay their utility bills to seek financial assistance through available sources and provides special provisions for the state's elderly and handicapped.

The Cold Weather Rule contains provisions for those customers who can't pay their utility bill in full at one time but want to maintain existing service. Under the rule that customer must: (1) contact the utility company and express an inability to pay the bill in full; (2) apply for energy assistance; (3) provide income information if requested; (4) make a minimum payment; and (5) enter into a payment agreement.

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